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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 002623

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PINR KDEM KCOR RS

SUBJECT: LANDSLIDE FOR UNITED RUSSIA IN MOSCOW, TULA,  
MARI-EL, AND IRKUTSK ELECTIONS

REF: A. ST. PETERSBURG 125

1B. YEKATERINBURG 66

1C. MOSCOW 2602

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan Elliott. Reason: 1.  
4 (b), (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: The ruling United Russia party dominated October 11 elections across Russia, thanks to the government's high ratings, its use of overwhelming administrative resources, and voting irregularities in the party's favor. Although official results for the Moscow City Duma elections will not be announced until October 31, new deputies were sworn in on October 20, making the challenge by the losing parties a useless exercise. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On October 11, 75 constituent territories of the Russian Federation's 83 regions held some form of local elections. All in all, there were 6,696 various elections, and referendums, including decisions on reshaping borders between municipal districts. Deputies of regional legislatures were elected in three constituent territories, including deputies in the Moscow City Duma, Tula Oblast Duma (located 200 kilometers south of Moscow), and the Mari-El State Assembly (in the Middle Volga area). In addition, Irkutsk held City Duma elections and there were local elections in the Moscow Oblast. Political experts agree that competition for the 35-seat Moscow City Duma was the most important campaign in terms of predicting the future development of the political system in Russia. The election campaign in Moscow is generally seen as reflecting or serving as a prototype for the next State Duma elections in 2011. The opposition parties which lost the Moscow City Duma campaign are alarmed that, if the Moscow City Duma elections were any indication, they may also lose seats and possibly all representation in the State Duma campaign. This situation suggests that the losers will look to Medvedev to guarantee the future well-being of their parties.

United Russia Dominates the Elections

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13. (C) On October 20, the independent vote monitoring group GOLOS provided unofficial, preliminary election results for the Moscow City Duma, Tula Oblast Duma, and the Mari-El State Assembly. The official results are scheduled to be released around October 31, but should not differ vastly. Preliminary results are as follows:

Moscow City Duma: United Russia is projected to win all 17 single-mandate seats, plus 15 of 18 proportional seats after it garnered 66 percent of party list votes, increasing its presence from 29 to 32 seats in the 35-seat Duma. United Russia has five new deputies, as well as 27 deputies who served in the previous Duma. (Note: Although United Russia received only 66 percent of the vote, it received three additional seats due to the introduction of the imperiali

system of dividing electoral spoils. End Note.) The Communist Party (KPRF) will remain as the lone opposition group with a maximum of three seats from proportional voting, in which they received 15 percent of votes cast. None of the four other opposition parties succeeded in overcoming the law's seven percent threshold. Voter turnout was only 34 percent. According to Interfax, Vladimir Platonov will continue as speaker of the Moscow City Duma.

**Moscow Oblast:** In Moscow Oblast, elections for 289 heads and 3,000 deputies of city councils and local governments, including mayors, took place. The Klin District was a flashpoint and was cited in the press prior to the elections since neither Yabloko nor Patriots of Russia were allowed to participate. In Klin, eight cities elected deputies to their local city councils. United Russia won 61 out of 95 mandates; KPRF won 14; LDPR won nine; Just Russia won six; and Right Cause won five. While United Russia's victory in Klin was not so resounding, elections there drew media attention because of September 13 protests in which residents demanded that Klin district head Alexander Postrigin resign. The Moscow Region Public Prosecutor opened a confidential criminal case against Postrigin September 8, allegedly related to fraud and illegal real estate transactions. According to a September 13 Yabloko party press release, the key election issues in Klin District related to land, corporations producing hazardous chemicals in the region, high housing and communal services tariffs, and corruption.

**Tula Oblast Duma:** According to GOLOS and the Tula Oblast government, United Russia is projected to win from 40 to 45

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percent of the vote in Tula Oblast; Just Russia 22-27 percent; and KPRF 20 percent. LDPR was slightly under the seven percent threshold at 6.4 percent. Yabloko, Right Cause, and Patriots of Russia all received under four percent. Voter turnout was 38-39 percent. Tula Oblast deputy Artur Beloshenko, who served as a deputy for 11 years from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDPR, told us October 19 that he was very surprised his party lost in Tula, and said he would defect to United Russia as a means of "political survival." Beloshenko sarcastically quoted Stalin, saying that it does not matter how one votes, but how the votes are counted.

**Mari-El State Assembly:** United Russia is projected to win 64-66 percent of the votes; KPRF 20-22 percent; and LDPR just over seven percent. Just Russia and Right Cause were both under four percent. Voter turnout was 58-59 percent.

**Irkutsk City Duma:** United Russia is projected to win 32 of the Irkutsk City Duma's 35 single-mandate seats; Just Russia one seat; and "independent" candidates two seats.

#### Elections Getting Worse

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**¶4. (C)** GOLOS Chairman Andrei Buzin told us October 12 that the elections were marked by improper use of administrative resources, pressure on people to vote for United Russia, misuse of absentee ballots, multiple voting, low voter turnout (except Mari-El), massive procedural violations, and violations of the electoral law. GOLOS Executive Director Liliya Shibanova told us October 12 that the violations were even worse than in previous years. Aleksander Savenkov, a journalist at Tulskiy Molodoy Kommunar confirmed October 14 that there were massive voting irregularities in Tula.

#### In Moscow City, Opinion Polls Differ Vastly from Results

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**¶5. (SBU)** While most political experts and observers predicted an overwhelming victory for United Russia, opinion polls prompted some hope that the ruling party would share the Moscow parliament with a few other parties. The

20-percent discrepancy between a VTsIOM poll, released shortly before the election date, and the actual results of the voting is out of line even for Russia, but especially in Moscow. At an October 20 press briefing, Buzin explained this large discrepancy through a mathematical analysis and argued that five parties would have likely been included in the Moscow City Duma had it not been for excessive fraud. According to VTsIOM and the Levada Center opinion and exit polls, United Russia received 45 percent and 55 percent of votes respectively; and another two to three parties were predicted to overcome the seven percent barrier. The VTsIOM poll predicted KPRF would receive 18 percent. Preliminary results have given about 66 percent of votes to United Russia, and about 15 percent to KPRF, leaving other claimants below seven percent. The unofficial turnout in two electoral districts in Moscow of 98 percent is another surprise, prompting a comparison with Chechnya and Ingushetia, where such election turnout is generally accepted and is the norm.

#### Remnants of Democracy in One Moscow Polling Station

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¶6. (SBU) On October 11, Prime Minister Putin cast his ballot in polling station number 2079 in Moscow's Gagarinskiy District. Paradoxically, the Communist Party won the elections in this station, perhaps because the media attention paid to it ensured that the votes there were more accurately counted. In the Gagarinskiy District on the whole, KPRF did quite well and nearly beat United Russia. United Russia won 34 percent, KPRF 30 percent, and Yabloko 17 percent of votes. At polling station number 2632 at the Moscow State University building in Vorovyevy Gory, in the same electoral okrug, the results for the Communists were even higher at 42 percent, while United Russia won 26 percent, and Yabloko 16 percent.

#### Yabloko's Slow and Painful Demise

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¶7. (SBU) Russia's liberal Yabloko party lost in all but a few of the elections. According to Interfax, on October 17 the party declared the Moscow City Duma elections to have been rigged, blamed the Russian leadership and Moscow City administration for the mockery of the election rights of Russian citizens, and demanded that elections be re-run. An October 13 Yabloko press release indicated that Yabloko's results would have been two-thirds higher if not for rigging

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the elections. The City Election Commission said Yabloko had received 4.71 percent of the votes, but Yabloko argued that it really exceeded the seven percent threshold and should retain at least one of its two seats in the Moscow City Duma.

Yabloko demanded prosecution of those engaged in election rigging, the disbandment of Moscow's election commissions and elections that guarantee equal representation for all the political parties organized by newly-formed election commissions. Speaking on Ekho Moskvy Radio on October 18, Yabloko leader Sergei Mitrokhin echoed his party's demands for cancellation of the results of the Moscow City Duma elections and a new election with a changed composition of the Moscow City electoral commission. ITAR-TASS reported October 18 that Mitrokhin had personally voted in polling station number 192, but after the ballots had been counted there were no Yabloko votes. All materials from this polling station are now under review by the prosecutor's office. Mitrokhin publicly blamed Medvedev, Putin, and Luzhkov for problems related to the elections.

¶8. (C) It is possible that Yabloko may split or reinvent itself based on the October 11 election results. On October 14, a group of Yabloko members asked Mitrokhin to resign because of the party defeat in the October 11 elections. Yabloko received only 4.71 percent of the votes in Moscow and 1.58 percent in Tula. Andrey Buzin, a member of the Yabloko regional council and a member calling for Mitrokhin's

resignation, explained the defeat in the Moscow parliamentary elections as a result of external causes, but also the party's own errors, such as "its unwillingness to cooperate with close political forces and negative relations between Mitrokhin and some members. Mitrokhin stated that he would not resign at the request of a few party members, saying that this issue should be raised and discussed at a party convention. On October 19, the Yabloko Moscow branch held a no-confidence vote and 17 of the members of its governing body voted for Mitrokhin to stay on as Yabloko's leader, while only three members voted against him.

Mayor Luzhkov's Victory

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¶9. (SBU) Vyacheslav Volodin, Secretary of the General Council Presidium of United Russia, stated publicly October 14 that his party's victory was ensured by Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov. Luzhkov ignored the noisy protest of State Duma opposition parties who demanded a review of the October 11 election results and a meeting with President Medvedev (ref. C). The meeting with President Medvedev is now scheduled for October 24, and the official results will be announced on October 31 instead of the original date of October 21. In the meantime, on October 15 Mayor Luzhkov signed an order that the newly-elected deputies of the fifth Moscow City Duma be sworn into office October 20 and hold the opening session October 21, rendering the election results a done deal. A large opposition protest took place outside the Moscow City Duma to coincide with the first session. Critics say that Medvedev and Luzhkov's recent proposal to allow parties with five or six percent to be represented in the Moscow City Duma and thereby enlarge political and public participation is not a long-term, democratic solution. Putin announced on his website October 19 that he would meet with United Russia leaders on October 30 to discuss the elections.

Comment

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¶10. (C) The October 11 elections demonstrated that United Russia is maintaining its firm grip across Russia. Although Medvedev has expressed a desire for a more democratic election process and more participation by opposition groups, many now see these as empty words. More seriously, if Medvedev meant what he said, critics say, these elections indicate that his agenda is failing. Currently in Russia there is one-party rule and the opposition parties are merely Kremlin-dependent puppets. If the Moscow City Duma is a bellwether, the future of democracy in Russia may be a two-party system in which the winning party, United Russia, maintains a majority, while Communist participation makes the political process appear more inclusive. Duma Deputy Sergey Markov told us that the results throughout the country demonstrate the wisdom and strength of Medvedev's Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov's concept of "sovereign democracy." The election results have ominous implications as they seem to indicate an increasing trend toward managed, top-down control from Moscow.

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